



Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Luna delivers the opening address at the 2008 Hispanic Youth Symposium in Sun Valley, Idaho.

## Latino students look to the future

By Marilyn Whitney, *INL Communications*

The Hispanic Youth Symposium, which started in 1990 with 100 participants and a \$1,000 scholarship, has grown to an event that drew close to 300 Latino students from throughout Idaho to Sun Valley April 25-27. This year, nearly \$2.2 million in scholarships was awarded to more than 130 students.

The symposium was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy, contractors at Idaho National Laboratory, Gem State Diversity Initiatives, state agencies and private employers.

Over the three-day event, students participated in motivational presentations, team-building activities and workshops on how Latinos can make brighter futures for themselves. Students also competed in speech, talent, art, athletic and interactive skills contests.

Keynote speakers included Idaho's Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Luna, who spoke about his Latino heritage and his family's struggle to escape poverty. Sen. Larry Craig also spoke to the group, emphasizing that Latinos will play a significant role in our nation's future.

Motivational speakers urged students to continue their education, take pride in their culture and become leaders in their communities. Richard Santana, aka "Señor Chocolate," founder of Homeboy Goes To Harvard Productions, recounted his experiences as a third-generation gang member who went on to earn a master's degree at Harvard University. He stressed that making the right choices and developing healthy, constructive relationships with parents, peers and educators are essential to breaking the cycle of drugs, crime and poverty.

The symposium's theme – "Si Se Puede! – Yes, It Can Be Done!" – reinforced the message that Latino students can and should obtain a college education to help open the door to a successful future. A college and career fair and one-on-one interviews with universities provided students with an opportunity to explore options for their post-secondary education and vie for scholarships.



*Interactive workshops that encourage participation and leadership are important elements of the Hispanic Youth Symposium.*

Educational institutions offering scholarships included College of Idaho, Boise State University, BYU-Idaho, College of Southern Idaho, Eastern Idaho Technical College, Gonzaga University, Idaho State University, Lewis-Clark State College, Northwest Nazarene University, University of Idaho, Utah State University and Utah Valley State College.

Several institutions offered College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) scholarships, and Gem State Diversity Initiatives awarded scholarships for students who show leadership potential and for the winners of the competitive events.

For the Issues to Action competition, students spent time in workshops where small groups tackled challenges facing Latino teens. Many focused on how to change negative perceptions of Latinos. Groups devised action plans to address a particular issue, and two students were selected to present their plans to the larger group and a panel of judges. The top five ideas were then presented to the entire symposium. Samantha Perez, Rigby High School, and Gabriel Lopez, Bonneville High School, teamed up to take the top award in the Issues to Action competition.

After a preliminary round, six students competed in the finals of the speech contest by presenting to the entire symposium. Maribel Mendez of American Falls High School took top honors.

Students entered artwork ranging from paintings and photography to jewelry and sculpture in this year's art contest. Eduardo Llamas, from West Jefferson High School (Terreton), won first place for his photography, while Eduardo Molina, Snake River High School



***Students participate in an Issues to Action workshop at the 2008 Hispanic Youth Symposium.***

(Blackfoot), won the people's choice award for his depiction of soldiers mourning a fallen comrade.

More than 60 students vied for a spot in the finals of the talent competition, which featured both traditional and contemporary performances. Finalists rapped, recited poetry, danced and played original music. The contemporary competition resulted in a tie between Antonio Hernandez of Columbia High School (Nampa), who recited his original poetry, and Daniel Arteaga of Jerome High School, whose rap number had the audience on their feet. The people's choice award for contemporary talent went to Javier Nuñez of Glenns Ferry High School for his street dance.

Anali Santos, Jerome High School, took first place in the traditional talent category, singing an original song written by her brother to

honor their grandfather. Brandy Juarez, Mountain Home High School, won the people's choice award for traditional talent with a Mexican dance.

The Judge Gutierrez 5K Run, named after symposium speaker and supporter Idaho Appeals Court Judge Sergio Gutierrez, provided student athletes with the chance for yet another scholarship. Joseph Montoya, Challis High School, placed first (male) for the second consecutive year, and Lynzi Coronado, Shelley High School, finished first among female runners.

While the symposium provided many students with financial support, all participants learned first-hand how many individuals and organizations are committed to helping them prove that "Yes, It can be done."

Read the [news release](#) that lists all scholarship recipients.

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